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President:	Mr. GANEV	(Bulgaria)
later:	Mr. PALLAIS (Vice-President)	(Nicaragua)

- Strengthening of the Coordination of Humanitarian Emergency Assistance of the United Nations: Report of the Secretary-General [37]

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The meeting was called to order at 10.55 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 37

STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/47/595)

The PRESIDENT: Before we begin consideration of this important item, I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, for his personal interest and unceasing efforts in putting humanitarian issues high on the agenda of the United Nations. The international community is faced with the unprecedented challenge of providing urgent humanitarian assistance, often under extremely difficult conditions, to a growing number of people throughout the world who have been affected by natural calamities and also increasingly by ethnic and civil conflict.

Much has been done by the United Nations to ensure effective and timely assistance. But much remains to be done to give the millions of victims around the world a semblance of life in dignity. It should, however, be recognized that this cannot be achieved without the shared responsibility of Member States. As we search for ways and means to restructure the United Nations to respond effectively to the new demands addressed to it, so must we, with the same vigour, make a renewed and collective commitment to strengthen the Organization to meet those pressures. This is an important discussion and I am confident that it will make a valuable contribution to our joint efforts.

Before calling on the first speaker, I should like to propose that the list of speakers in the debate be closed today at 12.00 noon.

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT: I therefore request those representatives wishing to participate in the debate to inscribe their names on the list as soon as possible.

Mr. uz-ZAMAN (Pakistan): I am honoured to participate on behalf of the Group of 77 in the debate on this agenda item, a subject of special importance to the developing countries. We thank Mr. Jan Eliasson, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for his important introductory statement. We also noted with interest his remarks in the Second Committee relating to agenda item 87, "Special economic and disaster relief assistance".

(Mr. uz-Zaman, Pakistan)

Last year the General Assembly adopted resolution 46/182 establishing the principles, guidelines and instruments for the humanitarian activities of the United Nations system. The adoption of that resolution also led to the creation by the Secretary-General of a new Department of Humanitarian Affairs, incorporating the former Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator. The Group of 77 welcomes the endeavour to strengthen the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations and to enable the Organization to respond with alacrity and in a coordinated and efficient manner to emergency requirements for humanitarian assistance. We assure the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Eliasson, of our full support and cooperation in the successful fulfilment of his demanding responsibilities.

The States members of the Group of 77 consider the question of humanitarian emergency assistance to be an issue of the utmost importance meriting the widest support of the international community. The last decade has witnessed a series of incidents in which the United Nations has been called upon to provide urgent and extensive assistance to populations afflicted by natural and man-made disasters. While a number of old crises still persist, many new emergency situations have emerged.

Since its establishment the Department of Humanitarian Affairs has had to address, and coordinate the response of the international community towards, an increasing number of acute emergencies in various parts of the world, including the Horn of Africa, Afghanistan, along the Bangladesh/Myanmar border, and in Haiti, Iraq, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, Nagorny-Karabakh, Somalia, the Sudan, Tajikistan and the former Yugoslavia. We also note with appreciation that the Department has put in place a major programme for the countries affected by the drought in southern Africa.

(Mr. uz-Zaman, Pakistan)

The prevailing situation in many parts of Africa and several least developed countries remains alarming. Drought, poverty, disease, environmental degradation, civil strife and underdevelopment are threatening many parts of the world. In Somalia alone almost 4.5 million people are threatened by severe malnutrition and related diseases. Of these, at least 1.5 million lives are immediately at risk, and it is estimated that 300,000 people have already died since November 1991.

The report of the Secretary-General (A/47/595) reviews the emergency response activities of the United Nations in meeting the pressing needs for humanitarian emergency assistance of a number of countries facing difficulties caused by natural or man-made disasters, inadequate economic infrastructure, internal or external disruption and serious constraints on economic development. The situation in many such countries remains bleak, especially in the Horn of Africa. The drought currently ravaging countries of southern Africa has no parallel in living memory. With less than 50 per cent of average crop yields anticipated during 1992-93, 18 million people in this region face the spectre of starvation.

The Secretary-General has also drawn our attention to the fact that the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan has worsened recently. So far the response of the international community to the consolidated appeal for emergency humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan has been disappointing. Up to the end of last month contributions amounting to less than one third of the funds requested had been received. We hope that the international community will respond positively by contributing additional resources of $180 million to United Nations agencies for emergency humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan to cover the remainder of 1992.

(Mr. uz-Zaman, Pakistan)

It is quite clear that, more than ever before, it has become essential to see the humanitarian needs of affected countries as the common concern of the international community and not merely as local or national problems. In this context the United Nations has a crucial and growing role to play, both through its operational agencies and as a catalyst for other important efforts of Governments, regional organizations and non-governmental organizations.

In discharging its onerous responsibilities, the Department of Humanitarian Assistance has to bear in mind the guiding principles enumerated in the annex to resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991. United Nations humanitarian assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. The principle of national sovereignty must be fully respected in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations when providing emergency humanitarian, economic and disaster-relief assistance.

There is a clear relationship between emergency, rehabilitation and development. In order to ensure a smooth transition from relief to rehabilitation and development, emergency assistance should be provided in a manner that would be supportive of recovery and long-term development. Thus, emergency measures should be seen as a step towards long-term development.

Furthermore, economic growth and sustainable development are essential for the prevention of, and preparedness against, natural disasters and other emergencies. Many emergencies reflect the underlying crisis in development facing developing countries. Humanitarian and special economic assistance should therefore be accompanied by a renewal of commitment to economic growth and the sustainable development of developing countries. In this context, adequate resources must be made available to address their development problems.

(Mr. uz-Zaman, Pakistan)

We are encouraged by the leadership of Mr. Eliasson in steering the work of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. We note with interest the activities of his Department in alerting and mobilizing support for emergencies which require the concerted efforts of the international community by effectively using the mechanism of "consolidated appeal"; convening pledging meetings to mobilize resources; establishing the necessary structures and modalities at the country level for coordination of humanitarian assistance; and, finally, monitoring the implementation of such humanitarian assistance programmes.

We agree with the Secretary-General that the Department must also adopt a number of related measures to enhance the overall capacity of the United Nations system to respond to emergency situations in many parts of the world. We strongly endorse the recommendation that additional resources be provided to the Organization for strengthening its humanitarian activities. We are also pleased to note that the Central Emergency Revolving Fund became operational in May 1992, when pledges reached the target of $50 million. We appeal to the donor community to contribute generously to the programmes and appeals of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in order to meet emergency humanitarian requirements in various parts of the world.

(Mr. uz-Zaman, Pakistan)

In conclusion, we should like to reiterate that the United Nations has a central and unique role to play in providing leadership and in coordinating the efforts of the international community to provide humanitarian emergency assistance to the countries affected. The capacity of the Organization must be strengthened and enhanced to meet the present and future challenges in a more effective and coherent manner. The United Nations should therefore be provided with additional resources on a voluntary basis to enable it to meet its future requirements. At the same time, adequate assistance should be provided to the developing countries to strengthen their capacity for disaster prevention and mitigation and to address their overall economic growth and development requirements.

Baroness CHALKER OF WALLASEY (United Kingdom): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Community and its member States on this agenda item. We are grateful to the Secretary-General for his report.

It is timely now to assess the initial impact of resolution 46/182 on the United Nations capacity to coordinate activities in the humanitarian field. The resolution was designed to remedy shortcomings that had become clearly apparent in disasters like the flight of Kurdish refugees, the famine in the Horn of Africa and the floods in Bangladesh. The truly tragic events that have resulted from the disintegration of Somalia demonstrate the scale and difficulty of the problems with which we have to deal. The southern African drought and the conflict in the former Yugoslavia are further examples of the complexity of our tasks these days.

The appointment of a high-level Relief Coordinator was never intended to be an instant or complete solution. None of us expected miracles, and we should remember that the Department of Humanitarian Affairs is just seven

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months old. Ensuring a timely and properly coordinated response to major and complex disasters is a complex task in itself. But we must make sure that the mechanism we have established is capable of three things. First, it must ensure a prompt response to disasters from the United Nations system, including an efficient division of labour between the executing agencies. Secondly, it must generate financial and operational support from traditional and other donors. Thirdly, where necessary, it must set in place arrangements to coordinate relief activities on the ground. It must also be able to mobilize the support and involvement of the international community, including Governments, regional organizations and non-governmental organizations.

Much remains to be done.

A crisis like Somalia demonstrates the multitude of tasks facing the new Department. It is neither purely a natural nor purely a man-made disaster. It involves humanitarian, political and security considerations. We pay tribute to the outstanding role played by Ambassador Sahnoun, and we regret his departure. Mr. Kittani has a hard act to follow. We promise him our full support. The United Nations performance in Somalia demonstrates that significant problems remain to be resolved. We remain deeply concerned at the security situation, the greatest constraint to the delivery of aid. Even though some national contingents are ready to deploy immediately, the deployment in accordance with the United Nations Plan of the United Nations guards - the first of whom I met the day they arrived in Mogadishu in September - remains painfully slow in the absence of even minimum agreement with the parties on this. The non-governmental organizations and international organizations that are delivering most of the help to the famine

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victims rightly look to the United Nations for leadership on the security issue. That leadership must be forthcoming.

Coordinating the United Nations system poses a further challenge. As Ambassador Eliasson has recognized, more effective lines of communication and responsibility must be established between the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the executing agencies. We expect the whole United Nations system, at all levels, to cooperate fully to tackle humanitarian emergencies. Procedural excuses and demarcation disputes are simply unacceptable. We wish to reiterate in this regard that the Relief Coordinator has overall responsibility for the coordination of the United Nations humanitarian assistance. At the same time, however, agencies, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in the former Yugoslavia, must continue to play key roles in individual countries within the framework of a coordinated approach.

We support the approach Ambassador Eliasson has adopted in implementing resolution 46/182. A Department that operates in both New York and Geneva faces its own problems of coordination. Policy-making and operational matters must be properly integrated. An effective strategy is required to ensure this, and the Department must be given the personnel resources, including support staff, to enable it to carry out its tasks. For complex emergencies with political dimensions policy coordination must be concentrated here in New York. Operational coordination should rest in Geneva, where agencies with expertise in information-gathering and disaster prevention are located. Most important of all, there must be effective leadership and coordination on the ground and sound communication within the United Nations and between it and its donors.

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The Geneva Inter-Agency Standing Committee on emergencies must have a key role in helping to ensure that individual agencies respond in a coordinated way to natural disasters and man-made crises. It needs to set an example of better coordination and cooperation to be emulated throughout the international humanitarian system. Members of the Committee that are not part of the United Nations system, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and non-governmental organizations, must be fully involved in its work. Recipients of assistance and potential donors must be closely informed of the Committee's work through the mechanisms established in Geneva.

National Governments also have a responsibility to coordinate their relief activities with those of the United Nations and to respond quickly to appeals for help. We support the existence of a single focal point for emergencies like the southern Africa drought and the use of consolidated inter-agency appeals. The approach has provided Governments with a more coherent picture of the size and scale of emergencies and has helped raise funds. The fact that donors were able rapidly to pledge more than $600 million to the southern Africa appeal was a clear illustration of this. Equally important will be an effective follow-up to appeals. In particular, Member States must be kept regularly informed about the state of fund-raising for individual appeals and the progress of United Nations activities in the field, including problems encountered and necessary adjustments to any particular plan of action.

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Perhaps most important of all is good coordination at the field level. The leadership of Kurt Jansson during the 1984-85 famine in Ethiopia provides a model. Ambassador Eliasson's 100-day plan for Somalia well illustrates the very kind of plan we now look for from the United Nations.

The Organization's resident coordinators should have a key role. In emergencies, they need to take the initiative with the national Government in coordinating the response. Coordination should be the Organization's forte: implementation can often be carried out by others, including national authorities and local and international non-governmental organizations. The United Nations resident coordinators must be adequately trained in disaster management. Their humanitarian role must be acknowledged in efforts to enhance the effectiveness of the Organization's field structure. United Nations field operations must build better relationships with non-governmental organizations. Better use should be made of the comparative advantages of non-governmental organizations, which are often more flexible than bilateral and multilateral organizations.

The responsibilities of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs are not limited to coordination. To be of long-term benefit, emergency aid must be part of a coordinated structure of relief, rehabilitation and long-term development. Efforts to put this principle into practice have so far had only limited success. So it is all the more important that the Department works closely with other parts of the United Nations system, in particular the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to try and overcome the obstacles to the creation of a coordinated structure of relief and development. In May the UNDP Governing Council stressed the importance of such coordination. The secretariat of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, whose

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work should be fully integrated with the rest of the activities of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in Geneva, must also play an important role. The strengthening of national capacities through technical seminars and the support of national programmes remain essential for effective disaster prevention and mitigation.

Humanitarian diplomacy too has a crucial role to play in promoting conditions for political dialogue in the countries concerned. We pay tribute to Ambassador Eliasson's efforts, especially in Burma, Iraq, Somalia and Sudan. Ensuring access and appropriate conditions for relief organizations on the ground is often an essential prerequisite for humanitarian operations. Where Government exists, humanitarian diplomacy can be used to remind States that they have a responsibility to facilitate the effective delivery of emergency assistance to those in dire need and to provide access to them.

But humanitarian diplomacy can also be used to ensure the security of those delivering humanitarian assistance. Relief personnel should not become a target of aggression from any side. The primary responsibility for ensuring both access and security lies with recipient States. But, especially where national authority has collapsed and in cases of civil war, the United Nations should take the lead in making appropriate security arrangements, including the use of security personnel when necessary. United Nations personnel should also be provided with the appropriate preparation and support to face complex emergency situations in the field.

We are glad that the Central Emergency Revolving Fund, of which member States of the European Community have provided a substantial proportion, is now in operation and has begun disbursing funds. It is a valuable tool for the Coordinator. It allows the United Nations to act promptly in the first

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crucial days of disasters when lives are most at risk. It must be used imaginatively, and agencies should be encouraged to draw on it where appropriate. The Fund must also be replenished as soon as donors respond to the relevant appeal. The cost of humanitarian assistance is a necessary burden on the international community. The European Community and its member States bear a substantial share of this burden. It is very important that other Member States in a position to do so also contribute a fair share.

I have described the role we see for the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and its staff. It is a large one: always complex, always difficult and sometimes dangerous. We recognize the constraints on the Department. Neither it nor the United Nations as a whole is capable of assuming sole responsibility for all humanitarian crises. The United Nations can lead, coordinate and facilitate. But the support of the international community is vital. The Department must not become overstretched to the point where it can no longer function effectively. It must beware of becoming so busy reacting to events that it neglects the key issue of how to ensure a smooth transition from relief to rehabilitation and development and is unable to maintain a global perspective.

In conclusion, our experience so far demonstrates the need for and value of the Department. But there is no room for complacency. The Department has had a baptism of fire. The humanitarian crises in Somalia, the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Sudan and the drought-affected countries of southern Africa demonstrate that the size of the problem it was designed to tackle is far greater than anybody anticipated. We must all rise to those challenges ahead.

Mr. KHARRAZI (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I would like to welcome the establishment of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and to congratulate Mr. Jan Eliasson on his appointment as the first Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordination. May I also thank the Secretary-General for his informative and thought-provoking report on this item.

The long list of disasters and emergencies is ever increasing, and as a result the number of victims of natural disasters has risen significantly. The widespread casualties and the magnitude of the destruction caused by events such as the earthquake in Iran in 1990, the cyclone in Bangladesh in 1991, the floods in China in 1991, the volcano eruption in the Philippines in 1991, and the ongoing drought and famine in Somalia are but some clear-cut examples of these unfortunate events. At the same time, the challenge of man-made disasters has become more formidable than ever. The Persian Gulf conflict and the fighting in Bosnia and Herzegovina reveal the urgent need for creating new dimensions in humanitarian and emergency relief assistance.

(Mr. Kharrazi, Islamic Republic of Iran)

To respond humanely to the enormous suffering of the victims of these natural disasters and emergency situations requires that a significant collective responsibility be shouldered by the international community, and in particular by the United Nations system. Through an earnest discussion during the second regular session of the Economic and Social Council last year, we concluded that in order to meet the new challenges, there was a genuine need to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations. Subsequently, a very detailed resolution was adopted by the General Assembly - resolution 46/182 - which, in addition to setting general guidelines, prepared the ground for some institutional rearrangements in the Secretariat, including the establishment of a special department and the appointment of an Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.

Now, questions arise as to how successful these new arrangements have been or whether they have received sufficient support to fulfil their responsibilities. It is too soon to judge the new institutional arrangements. The Under-Secretary-General and his new Department should be given time to adjust to the increasing call for humanitarian assistance world wide. None the less, institutional arrangements per se do not guarantee the system's effectiveness. Indeed, besides institutions, there are some other prerequisites.

The main predicament of the current humanitarian emergency aid arrangements relates to the issue of financial resources. When a disaster occurs, there is an urgent need for a large amount of material and financial resources. However, raising contributions takes time, and even so, the amount raised is not always in line with the actual needs of the affected areas. To surmount this problem, and to ensure the ability of the system to respond

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adequately to the needs of disaster-stricken countries, additional financial resources should be mobilized to prevent certain emergencies from recurring.

Considering the imperative role of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund to respond to emergencies on the one hand, and the time-lag that exists between pledges and actual contributions on the other hand, serious thought should be given to a possible increase in the target of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund from its current $50 million. Of equal importance is the disbursement of the unpaid pledges made by some donor countries, given the fact that so far, more than $11 million of the Fund has been utilized for emergency relief activities Furthermore, in order to expedite the entire process of emergency assistance, there is a need for more flexibility in utilization of the revolving Fund.

On a more positive note, the consolidated inter-agency appeal, through collective measures in collection and analysis of information, along with a list of priorities of relief activities, has facilitated the integration of the programming and mobilization of resources. However, I should like to express our concern that in some cases the consolidated appeals launched by the Secretary-General also have received insufficient response.

The Islamic Republic of Iran welcomes the recent initiatives that increase the emergency-assistance ability of the United Nations system and looks positively on the steps taken by the Department to make appropriate arrangements with interested Governments as well as intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to provide the United Nations more expeditious access to their emergency relief capacities.

In this respect, as a complementary measure, regional cooperation, through the pooling of available regional resources strengthened by

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international support, can play a cardinal role in prevention and stand-by capacity. As such, the establishment of regional and subregional centres to serve as focal points for storing and distributing relief items would contribute significantly to the viability of international relief operations. In addition, from a cost-effective standpoint, the related costs of storing and shipping emergency items from Europe to other regions would seem much higher than the possible implementation of a network of regional warehouses.

Another vital consideration in providing relief services is that a few days after the occurrence of a disaster, the emergency situation often becomes less immediate. Survivors are found and temporarily resettled, and such actions are misconstrued as the end of the emergency. But, indeed, the most important tasks remain, such as restoration of basic services, including a sanitary water supply, food, schools, health care, etc., all of which call for additional resources. In many cases, the human suffering continues beyond the relief process. Accordingly, international support must be structured in such a way as to expedite the process of rehabilitation and reconstruction of the affected areas.

While commending the efforts of the Department for Humanitarian Affairs to ensure the active participation of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in preparing for consolidated appeals, we feel there is still room for more involvement of these institutions. Taking note of the guiding principles of General Assembly resolution 46/182, we believe that the active participation of the Bretton Woods institutions in Inter-Agency Standing Committee meetings, which address policy issues relating to the United Nations approach to emergencies, will bring about many positive results, especially in the relief-to-development continuum.

(Mr. Kharrazi, Islamic Republic of Iran)

In accordance with resolution 46/182, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs is given the crucial task of coordinating the furnishing of assistance in all types of emergencies, whether caused by natural or man-made disasters. Clearly, no progress in fulfilling this task can be achieved unless the Department is fairly provided with the necessary personnel and administrative resources.

The root causes of many natural disasters lie deep within the economic problems facing developing countries. With limited resources at their disposal, many of these nations have focused merely on meeting the basic needs of their population and thus have not been able to invest in preventive projects. Therefore, as part of an international crusade to curb the number of casualties and the magnitude of the destruction imposed by calamities in developing countries, and in line with the spirit of General Assembly resolution 46/182, it is necessary to pursue energetically projects aimed at disaster prevention.

Furthermore, it can be surmised that addressing the causes of emergencies and investing in disaster prevention and mitigation would be far more effective than providing assistance after the actual occurrence of a disaster. Therefore, we strongly support the activities of the United Nations system in these areas. By the same token, and from a broader perspective, without resumption of economic growth and development in the developing countries, no serious attempts at preventive measures can be undertaken in those countries.*

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* Mr. Pallais (Nicaragua), Vice-President, took the Chair.

(Mr. Kharrazi, Islamic Republic of Iran)

Another critical area of concern is the particular nature of assistance provided during catastrophes. Owing to a mind-set that we all share, most assistance is focused on food items, thus further tightening the hand of the relief agencies to meet other needs of the emergencies' victims. As indicated in the Secretary-General's report, only 20 per cent of the target set for non-food items is being met, a fact that severely limits the capabilities of the affected countries to address even their water and health needs, let alone the reconstruction and development processes.

Unfortunately, our experience also indicates that humanitarian assistance has been at times overshadowed by political considerations, which exacerbates the situation of victims of emergencies. The insufficient amount of assistance provided to the Afghan and Iraqi refugees in Iran, as well as to the victims of the deadly earthquake in our country in 1990, are clear cases in point. What we are dealing with here is the saving of precious lives and the alleviation of human suffering. Let me now quote the Secretary-General's view on this issue:

> "Trust also requires a sense of confidence that the world Organization will react swiftly, surely and impartially and that it will not be debilitated by political opportunism ...". (A/47/277, para. 83)

Therefore, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs faces a sensitive responsibility in forging a partnership in which political consideration will not influence the provision of humanitarian assistance.

In conclusion, the human and financial costs of inaction could far outweigh the costs of addressing the main causes of the ever-increasing number of victims and the magnitude of destruction inflicted by various disasters.

(Mr. Kharrazi, Islamic Republic of Iran)

Therefore, we members of the international community all shoulder a moral obligation to work jointly, regardless of political considerations, to alleviate the suffering of the victims of natural disasters and emergencies and to intensify preventive measures and preparedness for such emergencies.

Mr. RAZALI (Malaysia): The Malaysian delegation would like to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report contained in document A/47/595.

My delegation would also like to express its gratitude and appreciation to Mr. Jan Eliasson for the very special efforts he has made and the commitment he has demonstrated in the short time since he has taken over the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. We wish him well.

My delegation welcomes the assurances given by Mr. Eliasson that the guiding principles contained in the annex to resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991 will be adhered to in the discharge of his responsibilities. It is imperative that humanitarian assistance, at all times, be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States is a fundamental principle that must be adhered to when providing humanitarian assistance. However, one must not forget that States too have a primary responsibility and role to play, namely, in providing accessibility, security and other appropriate arrangements to ensure a smooth flow of United Nations and international relief supplies and assistance.

My delegation is happy to note that the Central Emergency Revolving Fund became operational a few months ago, after its target of $50 million had been reached in the first half of the current year. We are also happy to see

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

that the Fund has already made a number of disbursements to Kenya, Somalia, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). We hope that another disbursement, to cover immediate humanitarian needs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, can be made on an urgent basis so as to relieve the suffering of the people there. It is my delegation's fervent hope that this start-up cost financed by the Central Revolving Fund to relevant United Nations organs, for the provision of humanitarian assistance, will be able to save thousands of lives and alleviate human suffering. My delegation shares the concern of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs about the limitation of staff and resources, in view of the increasing number of disasters and emergencies requiring an urgent United Nations response. My delegation is also disappointed to learn that only $30 million out of the $50 million pledged by donors have been received so far. In this regard, my delegation is hopeful and confident that donors that have not done so will make their contributions shortly.

We should like to demonstrate the importance we attach to humanitarian assistance. In this context, in a small measure, it is still not too late for us to announce now that the Malaysian Government has agreed to make a token contribution of 20,000 Malaysian dollars to the Fund. Even though the amount is not substantial, we believe that this token contribution marks a significant commitment on our part as a developing country.

Insecurity in all its various forms has been one of the greatest obstacles to the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Serious threats to the security of humanitarian personnel are routinely reported, and over the years a number of relief staff have lost their lives while on duty. The delivery of

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

humanitarian assistance has been seriously disrupted or even halted as a result of threats made to staff and even to the property of humanitarian organizations. My delegation shares the Secretary-General's view that the safety of United Nations personnel involved in humanitarian activities must be given the utmost consideration. We believe that the present unwarranted situation must cease in order to ensure the smooth and timely delivery of humanitarian assistance. In this regard, my delegation urges all Governments and parties to conflicts fully to respect and recognize the norms and provisions established by international humanitarian law.

My delegation welcomes and supports draft resolution A/C.5/47/L.2 - just adopted without a vote by the Fifth Committee, at its 28th meeting, on 18 November - relating to respect for the privileges and immunities of officials of the United Nations and the specialized agencies and related organizations. We are confident that this draft resolution will subsequently be adopted by the General Assembly.

The Malaysian delegation also welcomes the establishment of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee in Geneva, as we believe that it will serve as an important tool for effective system-wide coordination, as envisaged in resolution 46/182. It is of crucial importance that the Department of Humanitarian Affairs be able effectively to coordinate the response by relevant individual agencies to both natural disasters and man-made disasters. While my delegation believes that some weaknesses still exist in the system, we are happy to note the assurance given by the Secretary-General in his report that he will review and fine-tune the existing mechanisms for coordination, at Headquarters as well as at the field level.

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

As in the past - before the existence of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs - relief agencies have been engaging in and undertaking fund-raising activities of their own accord. It was to avoid confusion among potential donors responding to the multiplicity of appeals that the General Assembly, by resolution 46/182, decided to launch consolidated appeals in cases of emergencies requiring a coordinated response.

My delegation is pleased to have been apprised of the fact that, hardly one year into its existence, the newly established Department of Humanitarian Affairs, with the cooperation of affected States and relevant organizations of the system, including non-governmental organizations, has already launched six consolidated inter-agency appeals. Leaving aside Afghanistan, my delegation is pleased to note that the generous response to most of these consolidated appeals - in regard to southern Africa and the former Yugoslavia - demonstrates the effectiveness of this new approach. In responding to the consolidated appeals, donors should adopt necessary measures to increase and expedite their contributions. For instance, they should set aside, on a stand-by basis, financial and other resources that could be disbursed quickly through the United Nations system. This request is not new; it is clearly mentioned in the annex to consensus resolution 46/182. In this regard, my delegation wishes to call on all potential donors to heed the request.

The Malaysian delegation believes the the role of the Department goes beyond mere coordination. We share the view of Mr. Eliasson, expressed during his briefing to the Group of 77 on 12 November this year, that

> "humanitarian assistance is not just providing immediate relief but also helping to create the foundation for better societies - for example, opening schools and improving the road system and the water supply."

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

Therefore it is important that emergency assistance be provided in ways that will take account of the needs of economic recovery and long-term development.

The rehabilitation phase should be used as an opportunity to restructure and improve facilities and services destroyed in emergencies, in order to enable them to withstand the impact of future emergencies. On the question of building better bridges between relief and rehabilitation and development, my delegation shares Mr. Eliasson's view that more resources should be directed towards such efforts.

The role of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs as a focal point for the collection, analysis and dissemination of early-warning information pertaining to both man-made and natural disasters - including assistance for developing countries through the establishment and enhancement of national early-warning systems - is crucial. While we are pleased to note that the Department

> "will undertake to intensify its efforts in early warning" (A/47/595, para. 73),

drawing upon the existing capacities of relevant organizations of the United Nations system, national institutions of interested Member States and non-governmental organizations, we wish to emphasize that these efforts must be exerted immediately - without delay. My delegation wishes to reiterate that if the usefulness of this warning system is to be ensured it must consist of three main components: identification of the danger as early as possible; coherent and effective notification of the nature of the danger; and the establishment, particularly by those countries affected by recurrent disasters, of national task forces with clear and effective communication links to the United Nations relief agencies.

(Mr. Razali, Malaysia)

An early-warning system on its own would not be sufficient. Consideration should be given to the question of giving the Department of Humanitarian Affairs an anticipatory and proactive role in drawing to the attention of the General Assembly and the Security Council, through the Secretary-General, the need for urgent action outside the scope of ordinary humanitarian-relief operations. For instance, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs should push for speedy United Nations relief efforts in seriously troubled situations, such as those in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Somalia. In Bosnia and Herzegovina the situation clearly calls for urgent action to establish safe havens and land corridors. In addition, more airfields should be opened, and air drops of supplies should be considered wherever necessary.

I wish to say, in conclusion, that it is the hope of my delegation that the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, which is now equipped with the necessary tools, will be able to live up to our expectations as it undertakes its challenging task of providing humanitarian assistance in a more effective and efficient manner. However, one must not forget that if the Department is to succeed in performing its task effectively it will require the backing of all Member States, relevant organs of the United Nations and the whole international community. In this regard, let me assure Mr. Eliasson and his newly established Department that they will have our full support and cooperation as they endeavour to accomplish all the tasks before them.

Mr. MONTAÑO (Mexico) (interpretation from Spanish): My delegation would like to thank the Secretariat for the timely preparation of the report on strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations.

(Mr. Montaño, Mexico)

Lack of resources, questions of competence between agencies for achieving primacy, duplication and overlapping of functions between agencies and non-governmental organizations are among the problems that have an appreciable effect on the efficiency of these activities. However, we recognize the efforts made by the agencies of the system and by the non-governmental organizations to find solutions to these problems.

The new Department of Humanitarian Affairs, under the effective leadership of Mr. Jan Eliasson, faces major challenges arising from the unfortunate increase in situations affecting several countries as a result of various natural phenomena, such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, floods and cyclones and even less unpredictable natural disasters, such as drought and those caused by civil conflict, major population movements and nuclear accidents. In the face of these situations the United Nations must act without delay to demonstrate its solidarity and to provide efficiently the necessary humanitarian assistance to alleviate the suffering of the peoples affected. In this regard, my delegation stresses the importance of the achievement by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of its primary objective: to strengthen the work of the whole system in a coordinated and consistent manner.

We are convinced that it was a very good thing for the secretariat of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction to become part of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. We support the work of that secretariat, and we are confident that it will be of great benefit in mobilizing the scientific and academic community through national committees that are contributing to the education of public opinion, to the promotion, at the national level, of programmes for the prevention of disasters, and to the preparation of people to respond appropriately to such catastrophes.

(Mr. Montaño, Mexico)

It is fundamentally necessary to recognize that many of the emergency situations that countries face and the lack of an adequate domestic response to natural disasters originate in economic and social underdevelopment. Therefore it must be stressed that humanitarian assistance should not be confined to temporary action aimed simply at dealing with problems at the major-emergency stage. If humanitarian assistance is to be effective, account must be taken of development problems over the medium and long terms with a view to providing real and comprehensive solutions, as is pointed out in resolution 46/182, which clearly envisages an integrated approach.

Faced with the remarkable growth in emergency situations, Mexico believes that it is essential that greater capacity be achieved in the mobilization and management of humanitarian assistance in a timely, efficient and respectful manner. This constitutes without any doubt one of the major objectives of the United Nations.

(Mr. Montaño, Mexico)

The delicate balance between the observance of the principle of sovereignty, the need for humanitarian assistance and the responsibility of States should be safeguarded, and the assistance granted in a spirit of respect and cooperation. The Government of Mexico stresses that humanitarian assistance must respect the principle of international law and the domestic legislation of States.

My delegation believes it is of the highest importance for development agencies and financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, to participate both in the planning phase for humanitarian assistance and in the subsequent stages, which should include rehabilitation and sustainable development in the long term. In this regard, we would like to see more, detailed information on the participation of such institutions. Furthermore, we welcome the establishment of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund and express gratitude to those countries which, through their donations, have made it possible for the Fund to achieve its objective, although we are aware that the proliferation of conflicts and disasters far outstrips the established figure.

We welcome the growing participation of the non-governmental organizations dealing with humanitarian matters. We believe that the Inter-Agency Standing Committee established under resolution 46/182 will be very useful, so long as it works in coordinated fashion and in close cooperation with the whole United Nations system. My delegation also believes that the creation of the consolidated appeals system called for in that resolution, including appeals to non-governmental organizations, is a great achievement. We recognize that they have been extremely useful in the cases of southern Africa, Afghanistan, Kenya, the Horn of Africa, the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Iraq.

(Mr. Montaño, Mexico)

So far as the review of emergency response activities is concerned, particular attention must be paid to situations facing such countries as Somalia, Sudan, Kenya and Mozambique, where the situation is deteriorating daily through drought, disease and famine. Undoubtedly the challenges facing the United Nations in providing the assistance required by these countries are enormous, since the situation is being exacerbated further by civil conflict and massive displacement of populations, which has hampered both political and operational aspects of the provision of assistance. This situation has also created unnecessary risks for those involved in administering relief. We agree with the Secretary-General, who in paragraph 33 of his report notes that the case of Somalia has been one of the most difficult and challenging assignments of the United Nations and the world community. We appeal to the parties to conflicts to cooperate with the Coordinator of Humanitarian Assistance and with the Organization so that its planning can be put into effect, particularly the 100-Day Action Programme.

My delegation is saddened by the critical situations besetting Afghanistan and Myanmar. We also regret that, because of conflicts in certain countries to which humanitarian relief is being provided, the security of staff is threatened. Indeed, many participants in these relief activities have sustained injuries or lost their lives in the discharge of their duties. What is required, therefore, is the cooperation of all the parties concerned. In that connection, it is essential for the United Nations to carry out an in-depth examination of the following factors: contract policies, security procedures, training of relief staff in risk management, organization of a comprehensive communications and evacuation system and life insurance coverage of staff. This will facilitate the preparation of future policies and the capacity to respond.

(Mr. Montaño, Mexico)

We are confident that the Organization will be able to provide a timely and appropriate response to emergency situations in cases of disaster, and that the technical and financial problems relating to inter-agency coordination and coordination with non-governmental organizations will soon be addressed. We stress the urgent need to combat the problem of extreme poverty and appeal to the solidarity of the international community to promote economic and social development of the developing countries. This is an important part of the preventive diplomacy agenda now being discussed by the United Nations and an essential element of any preventive humanitarian assistance programme.

The flows of refugees generated by the conflict in the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia are proof that even privileged parts of the world are not immune to such problems. It is therefore fundamental to recognize that it is only through joint action by humanity that emergency situations can be eradicated and a more efficient response can be made to the distressing situations caused by natural or man-made disasters.

Now that the cold war has ended, we must make the most of the opportunity to seek better international cooperation in promoting rehabilitation and development of the aid-receiving States, which deserve to be a United Nations priority. The new Department of Humanitarian Affairs set up under Ambassador Eliasson can count on the constant support of the Government and delegation of Mexico.

Mr. BUTLER (Australia): It is a sad reality that the global need for humanitarian emergency assistance is more urgent today than it has ever been. The adoption by the General Assembly last year of resolution 46/182 on strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the

(Mr. Butler, Australia)

United Nations was therefore of vital significance. That resolution provided a much needed comprehensive framework for the provision of humanitarian relief assistance, both in terms of the guiding principles and the modalities for such assistance, including its coordination. It was a resolution which the Australian Government strongly supported. Action was taken quickly to put the resolution into effect through the establishment by the Secretary-General of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the appointment of Mr. Jan Eliasson as Under-Secretary-General and Emergency Relief Coordinator. The Central Emergency Revolving Fund, as well as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, called for in the resolution, were also established.

The comprehensive report by the Secretary-General clearly demonstrates that a lot has been achieved in the time since the resolution was adopted. We commend the dedication of Under-Secretary-General Eliasson and his staff, as well as the United Nations agencies and other relevant international bodies, for their commitment to this objective. In particular, a concerted effort has been made to address, practically and effectively, the many complex and resource-intensive aspects of coordinating humanitarian emergency assistance, including enhancing coordination within the United Nations system, the effectiveness and timeliness of the United Nations response to emergencies, and the management of humanitarian assistance at the policy and country levels.

(Mr. Butler, Australia)

The number of emergency situations cited in the report which the Department of Humanitarian Affairs has had to address in its first months of operation illustrates starkly the magnitude of the problem confronting us - in the Horn of Africa, Somalia, Afghanistan, along the Bangladesh/Myanmar border, and in Haiti, Iraq, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, Nagorny-Karabakh, the Sudan, Tajikistan and the Balkans. As the report notes, this trend - in which the United Nations is being called upon to respond to an increasing number of disasters and emergencies - is, sadly, expected to continue in the future.

What we must also recognize is that the work of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs is not only of enormous importance in humanitarian terms, but, in our new circumstances, is able to contribute directly to peace and security. These new and increased demands for humanitarian emergency assistance underline the importance of assessing the scope of the international community's response and the need to continue to refine and develop the modalities for coordinating it. Can we do more? Can the system be improved further? We believe the answer to both questions is "Yes".

We therefore endorse the view expressed in the Secretary-General's report that the Department of Humanitarian Affairs must address all the tasks and measures envisaged in resolution 46/182 to enhance the overall capacity of the United Nations system to respond in a coordinated way to emergencies. These tasks include: serving as focal point for the collection, analysis and dissemination of early warning information pertaining to both man-made and natural disasters as well as assisting developing countries, upon request, with the establishment and enhancement of a national early warning system; making appropriate arrangements with interested Governments and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to enable the United

(Mr. Butler, Australia)

Nations to have more expeditious access, when necessary, to their emergency relief capacities, including food reserves, emergency stockpiles and personnel, as well as logistic support; setting up an information system, drawing upon existing databases within the United Nations system as well as input from the field, in order to make available timely information in a consolidated manner to Governments, United Nations organizations, non-governmental organizations and other parties concerned with humanitarian assistance; and supporting special coordination units, such as those set up to service the Inter-Agency Standing Committee or to deal with reporting and coordination requirements of the Horn of Africa and southern African emergencies.

It is not enough, however, to establish mechanisms for gathering, analysing and disseminating information. It is essential also to ensure that arrangements for acting on that information are properly coordinated so that duplication of effort is avoided and that the best use is made of available resources. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs has a pre-eminent role in working with government, non-governmental organizations and other United Nations agencies to establish what needs to be done in a particular humanitarian emergency and to ensure that those agencies and organizations best equipped to handle particular tasks are given responsibility for them.

To carry out its tasks effectively, the Department will require increased resources. Those resources must be provided without delay. This should be done by a reallocation of resources from within the system to this vital new part of it.

We are particularly pleased to note in the report that the Department of Humanitarian Affairs intends to intensify its efforts in early warning, as

(Mr. Butler, Australia)

envisaged by resolution 46/182, drawing upon the existing capacities of relevant organizations and institutions of the United Nations system, national institutions of interested Member States and non-governmental organizations. We are also pleased to note the view expressed in the report that the United Nations must, in close consultation with all humanitarian partners, make the necessary arrangements to follow up and act on early warning information. These are key elements in building an effective global humanitarian emergency assistance system. Early warning and expeditious follow-up are vital if humanitarian disasters are to be avoided.

This is particularly so in the case of famine. The recurring tragedy of mass starvation in Africa - often made worse by accompanying military conflict, but not wholly explained by that conflict - underlines the need for the United Nations system as a whole, and the Security Council in particular, to strengthen its capacity to meet the problems of potential famine. To meet this need, the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Senator Gareth Evans, proposed on 28 September 1992, in his statement in the general debate,

> "the establishment of a group of senior officials from developed and developing countries and relevant United Nations agencies, supported by a strengthened Department of Humanitarian Affairs and by a comprehensive database, which would convene regularly to conduct high-level reviews of the global famine situation and identify emerging crisis situations. Such a group would be responsible for turning pledges into timely, life-saving deliveries of food to people in need, and would seek to ensure that donor contributions were complementary, properly coordinated and well-targeted." (A/47/PV.15, pp. 17-18)

(Mr. Butler, Australia)

This proposal is aimed at consolidating and strengthening the international regime in relation to food shortage crises, crises which are critical and which warrant this high-level focus of attention. The high-level group would be integrated into the evolving humanitarian emergency system. For its effectiveness, it would rely on the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and on the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and its important global information and early warning system on food and agriculture, as well as on other relevant United Nations agencies. It is a proposal which would give practical effect to the call in the Secretary-General's report for intensified efforts in information, collection, analysis, early warning and effective coordinated action - specifically in this case in relation to the global famine situation.

So what is at issue in our proposal? It is modest; it is practical. It deals with something of irreducible and global importance - famine, in which massive human suffering is involved. It addresses a subject which is squarely within the responsibilities of the United Nations. We therefore appeal to all to support it.

The Secretary-General's report refers to a number of other important aspects of humanitarian emergency assistance, including the essential need for sufficient funding to be made available for such assistance and the expeditious payment of pledges made by Governments, particularly in response to consolidated appeals.

A vital aspect of the delivery and distribution of humanitarian emergency assistance is the security and protection of staff. It is essential that the United Nations provide adequate security for its personnel, and that its humanitarian activities are not unduly hampered in fulfilling their objectives.

(Mr. Butler, Australia)

The United Nations and its agencies have achieved much in the last year in the implementation of resolution 46/182. But the scale and complexity of humanitarian issues brought about by the immense changes in the international situation in recent years demand even more vigorous and creative approaches. We should look urgently and positively at ways in which we can further embrace the effectiveness of United Nations responses to humanitarian disasters. The humanitarian imperative is, and must be, universal. That is our challenge.

Mr. SARDENBERG (Brazil): The representative of Pakistan, speaking on behalf of the Group of 77, has already expressed the views of the Group on the question of United Nations coordination of humanitarian assistance, in a statement to which my delegation fully subscribes. I wish to point out some issues that in our view deserve particular attention by the international community and by the General Assembly in particular.

The task of ensuring the effectiveness of United Nations initiatives in providing humanitarian assistance, particularly in emergency situations, is today a major component of the life of the Organization. Humanitarian assistance and humanitarian concerns have rightly become an inseparable part of what the United Nations is and what it stands for. The humanitarian sector of the Organization is, quite understandably, one of the most visible to the public at large. Much of what we do or fail to do in this field has a direct bearing on public perceptions of our work.

The past 12 months have been extraordinarily eventful in terms of developments related to humanitarian action. Sadly, many such developments have been for the worse. On the positive side, as regards the institutional arrangements within the United Nations, there was the adoption of resolution 46/182 after extensive consultations and deliberations that greatly

(Mr. Sardenberg, Brazil)

contributed to clarifying many important issues related to humanitarian assistance. It has provided us with a solid basis for action that includes both the overarching guiding principles that are essential to preserve the quality of humanitarian assistance under all circumstances and the specific modalities required to improve its efficiency and, most of all, its effectiveness.

During the last several months we have more than once been struck by facts that eloquently confirmed the perception that the issues addressed in resolution 46/182 are indeed essential for organizing and implementing prompt relief actions to people in need. We have welcomed the steps taken to implement the decisions taken by the General Assembly last year, notably the establishment of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, under the able leadership of Ambassador Jan Eliasson, and the starting of operations of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund and of other mechanisms for ensuring a more coordinated and more effective response to the need for humanitarian relief.

We were also struck by the events in a number of regions of the world where we witnessed tragic developments in emergency situations related to natural disasters or to circumstances of war or civil strife.

Brazil reiterates its solidarity with all those countries that are undergoing the effects of natural or other catastrophes. The worsening humanitarian situation in many parts of the world, including Africa, has aroused deep sympathy and concern in Brazil. We encourage the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, as well as other competent sectors of the United Nations system, to continue to mobilize support for humanitarian action in those areas.

In most if not all of those situations it was not difficult to discern, within the manifold forms of human suffering - each one a tragedy in itself -

(Mr. Sardenberg, Brazil)

the underlying problem of underdevelopment and of insufficient economic growth, with the corresponding lack of preparedness to cope with emergency situations. Each emergency is a reminder of the shortcomings of international cooperation in the effort to reduce economic disparities among countries and to ensure a more favourable international environment for economic growth and development in developing countries.

Every day lost for development cooperation is a day lost for the prevention and mitigation of humanitarian emergencies. We welcome the increased awareness of the need to ensure a continuum between relief and development activities. We must not lose sight of the fact that it is in the crucial areas of cooperation for development, such as trade, finance and aid that the real and durable solutions are to be found.

The resurgence of conflicts resulting from ethnic intolerance and racism has compounded the problem. In many cases, indeed in too many cases, time-honoured norms and principles of international humanitarian law were utterly disregarded. In other instances banditry has made the delivery of humanitarian aid all but impossible.

Promoting greater respect for the norms and principles of international law, including humanitarian law, has turned out to be a major task for the international community in the post-cold-war era. It is hard to envision the future of humanitarian action if the necessary normative framework is constantly being called into question by words and deeds.

Among the principles that merit particularly urgent attention are those related to the security of civilians in situations of armed conflict and of personnel involved in relief activities. Throughout the years the international community was able to build an invaluable corpus of rules,

(Mr. Sardenberg, Brazil)

respect for which is absolutely essential if we are to give effect to the most basic humanitarian notions. Unfortunately, we are now witnessing a number of instances of grave violations of such rules. Attacks against civilians or relief workers must be condemned in the strongest terms.

The Secretary-General's report mentions the topic of whether or not there is a need to break new ground in international law in the humanitarian field. The view of my delegation is that recent events have made it quite clear that the real challenge confronting us is not so much that of creating new norms as that of promoting the strict observance of already existing norms.

As regards the possible relationship between humanitarian assistance and national sovereignty, a question also mentioned by the Secretary-General in his report, my delegation understands that, as stated in all relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, the delivery of humanitarian assistance does not constitute an infringement of sovereignty. The strengthening of United Nations action in this field is therefore not contingent on any conceptual revisions in this particular regard.

At the level of more detailed operating procedures there is room for considerable improvement in rules related to questions such as recruitment policy, training, insurance coverage, and others, as indicated by the Secretary-General. We encourage the new Department to proceed with an adequate consideration of those questions.

(Mr. Sardenberg, Brazil)

One of the central tenets of humanitarian action, as stated in several international instruments, including, most recently, General Assembly resolution 46/182, is that of neutrality, impartiality and universality. The report of the Secretary-General indicates the importance of these notions for the effectiveness of humanitarian aid.

Humanitarian action has a two-way relationship with the credibility of the United Nations as an organization capable of impartial and neutral endeavours. On one side, humanitarian activities are made possible because such credibility exists, and strongly so; on the other, the fact that such activities are successfully carried out reinforces that credibility. All our endeavours in this field must be guided by the permanent concern to strengthen that mutual relationship.

Mrs. FRECHETTE (Canada) (interpretation from French): Barely a year ago the General Assembly adopted resolution 46/182, on strengthening the coordination of United Nations humanitarian assistance. At that time we could hardly have imagined that the new Coordinator, whose position we had just established, would at the very outset of his mandate face humanitarian crises of such unprecedented number, magnitude and complexity.

First of all my delegation wishes to congratulate Mr. Eliasson and his team for the tremendous efforts they have made to meet this exceptional challenge. They can rest assured of my Government's complete support and cooperation.

It is still too early to make a complete assessment of the performance of the new system established by resolution 46/182 and to pass judgement on the lessons to be derived from the experience of the past year. It seems important to us, however, that at the next session of the General Assembly we

(Mrs. Fréchette, Canada)

proceed to a detailed evaluation in order to make the required corrections without delay. Improving the capacity of the United Nations to manage humanitarian crises must remain a priority, since our successes in that domain will influence in large part our populations' support for the United Nations.

In the provisional assessment we are making today we can already underline the gains represented by the establishment of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund for humanitarian assistance, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the consolidated appeals for funds. Those mechanisms, as well as the organization of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, which consists of a policy component in New York and an operational one in Geneva, have largely contributed to bringing greater consistency to the responses of all parts of the United Nations system and have allowed for a more rapid reaction to humanitarian emergencies. Although the system has to be further developed, there is no doubt that we are heading in the right direction. We are convinced that the Department, under the dynamic leadership of Mr. Eliasson, will be able to meet all the hopes we placed in it when it was established.

We hope that now that the essential coordination mechanisms are in place the Department of Humanitarian Affairs will be able to consider certain questions that appear to us to require special attention. We are thinking in particular of improved early-warning mechanisms aimed at better forecasting of human catastrophes and at an increased quick response; of the prepositioning and prepackaging of emergency relief supplies; of the strengthening of field coordination; of increased authority for field coordinators to disburse emergency relief funds; of the preparation of communications strategies aimed at the provision of better information and at a better understanding of the responses by the United Nations to humanitarian crises.

(Mrs. Fréchette, Canada)

The importance of this last point cannot be overemphasized. The work of the United Nations and of its specialized agencies is too often poorly known and not well understood. An increased effort to inform public opinion is essential if we want to keep public confidence and support.

(spoke in English)

Much remains to be done to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations to respond to humanitarian emergencies, but it seems to us that three essential conditions must be met if the Department of Humanitarian Affairs is to have any hope of successfully fulfilling its mandate.

The first condition is the availability of sufficient human resources to do the job with which the Department has been entrusted. The management of humanitarian crises is clearly one of the highest priorities of the United Nations at this stage, and that priority should be better recognized in the allocation of human resources within the Secretariat. We would also insist that the funding base for the Department of Humanitarian Affairs be regularized and that resources currently depending on extrabudgetary funding be brought under the regular budget.

The second condition is the full cooperation of all parts of the United Nations system. When it comes to humanitarian emergencies there is no room for rivalries and turf fights. All parts of the system must pull together and agree to adjust their activities to an overall plan, which is the most efficient and cost-effective way to proceed. In this respect, we note with satisfaction the decision of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to empower Mr. Eliasson to assign responsibilities within the United Nations.

The third essential condition is a continued willingness on the part of Member States to contribute generously to the common cause. This moral

(Mrs. Fréchette, Canada)

responsibility does not concern traditional donors alone; we urge all countries that are in a position to do so to contribute, even if modestly, to the United Nations consolidated appeals.

We were disturbed to read in the Secretary General's report that:

"In spite of the appeal of General Assembly resolution 46/182 to the effect that Governments should expedite the delivery of pledges that they make in the context of consolidated appeals, no discernable improvement has been achieved and a considerable time-lag still exists between pledges and actual contributions". (A/47/595, para. 65)

That is a deplorable situation, which must be corrected.

Canada's contribution in the past year has been significant. More than half of our $400 million food-aid budget has been used for emergency relief operations this year. We have disbursed approximately $70 million for emergency relief operations in the Horn of Africa, including $15.4 million for Somalia, where a Canadian battalion is being deployed to provide security for the humanitarian deliveries, in addition to the three Canadian aircraft that are participating in the airlift operation. In response to the severe drought in southern Africa Canada has provided $58 million in both food and non-food relief items. We have also committed more than $25 million in humanitarian aid to the former Yugoslavia, where 2,400 Canadian troops are currently serving under the United Nations flag. Our contribution to the Central Emergency Revolving Fund and to the joint programme of the Department of Humanitarian Assistance and the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO) amounted to nearly $3 million.

The experience of the past year in trying to deliver humanitarian assistance to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Somalia shows that the challenges

(Mrs. Fréchette, Canada)

facing the United Nations are more complex than the mere availability of money or the efficient coordination of its humanitarian agencies. In the last part of his report the Secretary-General has very usefully identified the complex set of problems we now have to confront. As he rightly points out, the humanitarian, political and security dimensions of the problems in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Somalia are inextricably linked and cannot be approached in isolation. That, in turn, has had consequences for United Nations collaboration with non-governmental organizations, which are and will continue to be vital partners of the United Nations in the delivery of humanitarian relief. In addition, the security of humanitarian relief personnel has become a major concern in relief operations.

Those are just a few of the many issues we shall need to address in the future. As I said at the beginning, my delegation believes that at the next session the General Assembly should carry out an in-depth evaluation of the performance and experience in humanitarian relief operations of the Department of Humanitarian Assistance. We invite the Secretary-General to include in the report he will prepare for that review a detailed examination of the complex questions he has so pertinently raised in this year's report.

Mr. PERKINS (United States of America): I am very pleased to be here today to participate in the discussion of strengthening the United Nations delivery of humanitarian assistance. Hundreds of thousands of lives depend on how the United Nations carries out this responsibility. Humanitarian emergencies have been multiplying rapidly with the end of the cold war, and the world is turning to the United Nations to provide the response to these emergencies. If the Organization and its Member States do not rise to this challenge, the United Nations will be seen to have failed no matter what it achieves elsewhere.

We have no illusions about the prospects for complete success. Humanitarian emergencies are by their very nature difficult to respond to. Many emergencies are occurring in areas of ethnic strife and armed conflict. As the forces of repression are lifted, latent tensions rise to the surface, and the number of emergencies continues to increase. We cannot instantly resolve them all. The challenge posed is difficult and will test our stamina. No matter how difficult the challenge, however, we have an obligation to respond as promptly and effectively as we can to each emergency.

Our first step in improving the United Nations response to humanitarian emergencies was to create the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. The report of the Secretary-General on strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations (A/47/595) cogently summarizes the development of the Department and its operations during its first seven months. The many eruptions of ethnic and civil strife, as well as the extensive drought in southern Africa, presented a formidable challenge to this new Department charged with coordinating the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

(Mr. Perkins, United States)

Under-Secretary Eliasson and his staff have made a commendable start. Under constant pressure to perform Herculean tasks, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs has made progress in assembling coordinated responses by the international community. This is in line with achieving a unitary United Nations, whose various agencies would focus clearly on the same goals, working without overlap or duplication of effort. The consolidated appeal for the drought emergency in southern Africa is a good example of the successful coordinating efforts of the Department. The subsequent 100-day plan for Somalia, although late in development, demonstrated the Department's capability to draw on all available resources for a comprehensive, integrated plan. Unfortunately, grave security problems have hindered its full implementation. But the Department has successfully elicited support from other United Nations departments and agencies in providing humanitarian assistance in situations of uncertain security.

The United States Government commends the Secretary-General for his thorough and thoughtful report summarizing the burgeoning humanitarian needs throughout the world and the progress and achievements to date in addressing those needs. Despite these good beginnings, the report also notes significant problems and inefficiencies in the system and offers some suggestions for remedial action. It is clear that much more needs to be done if the world community is to respond effectively, with a united effort, to the crises of the future. It is therefore appropriate that we take a close look at the Department of Humanitarian Affairs to ensure that it has all the tools necessary to fulfil successfully the awesome task we gave it in resolution 46/182.

I should like to highlight a few issues which the United States finds of particular importance.

(Mr. Perkins, United States)

First, we should like to see the Department issue an organizational and programmatic plan, with goals and benchmarks projected over a several-year period and a description of the resources needed to perform the tasks assigned it in resolution 46/182. Understandably, it cannot be expected to respond operationally to all humanitarian crises. Some situations may require only a small degree of oversight. This should be clarified. The Department should also establish priorities that would ensure that resources are devoted first to coordinating the delivery of basic humanitarian assistance when lives are immediately at stake. Such a plan will provide the Secretary-General and Member States with the criteria for determining the resources the Department needs to perform effectively. The current division of the Department between the office in New York and the office in Geneva is an inefficiency that needs to be evaluated, bearing in mind that there are humanitarian agencies headquartered in each city. We would suggest that the organizational plan also clarify the integration of the former Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO), the Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian and Economic Assistance Programmes Relating to Afghanistan (UNOCA) and the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction into the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. It is most important to my country that the United Nations streamline its operations and eliminate redundancies and inefficiencies. The aforementioned recommendations address that concern.

The increasing number of humanitarian crises has already rendered obsolete the initial planning period for the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. It has become clear that the Department was not provided sufficient resources to evaluate concurrent crises, mount appeals, and organize immediate and long-term responses for those countries unable to help themselves

(Mr. Perkins, United States)

adequately. It also has been unable to provide donors with accurate and timely information on the status of relief being provided for a crisis. Nor has it had sufficient staff for full performance of its other tasks: to inform Governments on disaster prevention and preparedness; to pool, analyse, and disseminate early-warning information on natural disasters and other emergencies; and to develop the capabilities for a rapid response to a variety of simultaneous emergencies. Given the high priority which the international community places on humanitarian assistance at the present time, resources should be redeployed to the Department of Humanitarian Affairs from other sectors of lower priority. The Department must be given the staff, office space and equipment essential to carrying out its mandate. We applaud the use of staff seconded from humanitarian relief agencies; staff must, however, be fully committed to the Department of Humanitarian Affairs.

In addition to sufficient resources, the Department must be given sufficient authority to effect appropriate, speedy and unified responses to humanitarian emergencies. Member States have charged the Department with the coordination of the response of the various United Nations agencies in these instances. Agencies must respond promptly to Department requests for action. Too frequently what should be a consolidated delivery system is fragmented by differences between agencies. This reflects negatively on the United Nations as a whole. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee can play a vital role in the solution of this problem. We are heartened to have learned that agency heads have recently demonstrated a high degree of cooperation in dealing with emergencies. Further efficiency might be possible if cooperative arrangements were formalized through written agreements, spelling out the responsibilities of participating agencies.

(Mr. Perkins, United States)

For field coordination, the United States supports the role of the United Nations Resident Coordinator performing as the Department of Humanitarian Affairs' representative in most emergencies where more than two United Nations agencies are involved. But the Resident Coordinators must be given sufficient authority and support to administer a unified programme on behalf of the Department. At the same time, it is vital that they consistently be selected for aptitude, motivation and experience, and that their training include emergency-relief coordination, a job requiring specialized skills and knowledge not necessarily possessed by a development specialist.

Unfortunately, the experience of the last several months has shown that United Nations staff assigned to deliver humanitarian assistance often do so at substantial personal risk, and that unique skills and organizational support systems, including adequate security, are required during conflicts. The United Nations cannot perform the tasks expected of it in emergencies if it is the first to abandon areas of conflict and the last to return. We support the Secretary-General's recommendations contained in paragraphs 75 and 76, which call for special attention for the revision of operating guidelines and the adoption of procedures to support United Nations agencies in areas of conflict. The United Nations must not abandon the rest of the international relief community when situations deteriorate into armed conflict.

The Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF) is a key component of the United Nations humanitarian response mechanisms. The difficulties agencies have encountered with the initial disbursement of funds from CERF have greatly concerned us. Legal and financial regulations must permit rapid access to CERF so that it is available as originally intended. In this regard, we question whether United Nations agencies providing humanitarian relief should

(Mr. Perkins, United States)

be required in practice to await confirmed pledges in order to borrow from CERF. We would not support the enlargement of the Fund until the need for greater resources is clearly demonstrated.

As I conclude, we want to again express appreciation to the Department of Humanitarian Affairs for taking on perhaps the most difficult of mandates and for making the many positive efforts it has since its inception. We hope that all nations will support its continued development and will provide the moral and financial support needed at this time. To do less would condemn us all to failure.

Mrs. FRITSCHE (Liechtenstein): When we discussed the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance last year, we took it upon ourselves to intensify our efforts and make a more effective contribution to saving lives and alleviating the suffering of people around the world.

The far-reaching changes of recent years have left us with a transformed political and ideological outlook. We face new opportunities and challenges. But there are also new conflicts and emergencies which will be decisive for the millions of afflicted people. The existing number of refugees and displaced persons is likely to increase for the following reasons: the world population growth, the economic crisis and the widening of the gap between rich and poor, erupting ethnic conflicts and environmental degradation.

The end of the cold war brought hopes for a more peaceful world, and they were justified to a certain extent. But while tensions eased in some parts of the world, violence erupted in others. The United Nations system is increasingly being called upon to play a leading role in ensuring an effective response to emergencies.

(Mrs. Fritsche, Liechtenstein)

Among the direct consequences of our deliberations of last year and of resolution 46/182 were the creation of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and the establishment of a revolving emergency fund as a cash-flow mechanism for an immediate initial response to catastrophes. Impressive work has been accomplished within the short period of existence of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs.

My delegation would like to take this opportunity to express its appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Jan Eliasson for his professional approach and personal commitment. Besides responding in a very effective manner to specific emergencies in the Horn of Africa, Afghanistan, along the Bangladesh/Myanmar border, in Haiti, Iraq, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, Nagorny-Karabakh, Somalia, the Sudan, Tajikistan and in the former Yugoslavia, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs launched initiatives to improve systems preparedness. In accordance with resolution 46/182, work has started on establishing a Central Register of Disaster Management Capacities as well as a register of stand-by capacity encompassing available resources to be drawn upon in cases of emergency.

We thank the Secretary-General for the comprehensive report reviewing the emergency-response activities of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. In this report, the Secretary-General points out that humanitarian assistance in conflict situations often has to be carried out under difficult and dangerous security conditions. Humanitarian-relief workers are at times not innocent bystanders in civil wars but targeted victims of violence. There have been many tragic cases when relief workers died while helping people in need.

This is a dangerous and very unsettling trend. We strongly condemn any threats to the security of persons carrying out relief operations. Such acts

(Mrs. Fritsche, Liechtenstein)

constitute a violation of international humanitarian law. The effectiveness of humanitarian relief operations depends on the safety in which they can be undertaken. The international community must therefore spare no effort to restore respect for the protective emblems of the United Nations and the Red Cross and to ensure compliance with humanitarian rules. We encourage the efforts of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs to continue to negotiate agreements with Governments and other concerned parties for access by operational organizations to people in need of humanitarian assistance.

My delegation would welcome the increased establishment and use of corridors and safe zones so that those in need can be reached by agencies, even and especially in armed conflicts.

We recognize that unprecedented demands for humanitarian assistance are being matched by an unprecedented need for the necessary resources; these include financial support and well-trained personnel - persons with specific knowledge and the required expertise in the field of emergency assistance. In order to enable the Department of Humanitarian Affairs to carry out its mandate, it must be provided with the necessary human and administrative resources.

The full cooperation of Governments is required in order to provide access to all persons in need of assistance. We note with regret that the delivery of humanitarian assistance, especially to emergency-affected peoples in the Horn of Africa but also in other areas, continues to be extremely difficult and frequently places the lives of relief workers in jeopardy. My delegation is of the opinion that there should be no obstacles - whatever the nature of the emergency - to reaching the victims rapidly.

(Mrs. Fritsche, Liechtenstein)

With regard to coordination arrangements at the country level, we welcome the suggestion in the Secretary-General's report that the United Nations Resident Coordinators be provided with the necessary authority, as well as administrative and financial support, to enable them to discharge effectively their respective responsibility in leading the coordination of humanitarian assistance.

It is clear that humanitarian assistance alone is not sufficient. We have to address the root causes of the emergencies - poverty, environmental degradation, ethnic and religious conflicts. Emergency assistance cannot replace development assistance. The only ultimate insurance against the catastrophic consequences of natural and man-made disasters is sustainable development.

My delegation welcomes this debate and wishes again to express its full support for the endeavours of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs under the leadership of Under-Secretary-General Jan Eliasson. I am convinced that this discussion will lead to the development of constructive proposals for the strengthening and further improvement of the emergency-response capacity of the United Nations.

The PRESIDENT (interpretation from Spanish): In accordance with General Assembly resolution 45/6 of 16 October 1990, I now call on the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Mr. SOMMARUGA (International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) (interpretation from French): The end of the cold war raised hopes for a more peaceful world. While in the new climate of international relations tension has indeed eased in several areas of conflict, violence has, unfortunately, flared up in other parts of the world and is today claiming not thousands, but millions of victims on every continent.

(Mr. Sommaruga, ICRC)

In an effort to respond more effectively to the resultant growing needs, the United Nations recently set up mechanisms to coordinate humanitarian assistance. The General Assembly is now making the first - no doubt preliminary - assessment of them.

This coordination, while obviously worthwhile, must be translated into operational reality and receive active support from the world's Governments. For the victims, action in the field is vital. Apart from a formal assignment of tasks, there is a need for harmonization of the approaches adopted.

Everywhere we look, the spectre of famine hangs over countless civilians. Indiscriminate shelling, forced displacement of populations, torture and massacres - all these are violations of international humanitarian law.

The increasing politicization of humanitarian work does not contribute to respect for the law. While it is encouraging that humanitarian issues are higher on the agenda of the international community today, their increasing politicization is disturbing, and must be checked. This calls for a more precise division of tasks and responsibilities between the humanitarian organizations seeking to alleviate suffering and the political bodies whose duty it is to tackle the causes of conflict.

In addition, a campaign to promote respect for international humanitarian law must be initiated as a matter of urgency. Otherwise, its erosion will weaken the very foundations of humanity.

Allow me to expand on the points to which I have just referred. Both the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies play an active part in the meetings of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and its working groups, where the independence of the ICRC is judiciously reflected by its status as an observer.

(Mr. Sommaruga, ICRC)

This constructive cooperation certainly deserves to be pursued and developed. It makes it possible to avoid duplication of efforts or failure to respond, owing to a distribution of tasks in accordance with the respective mandates of the various organizations concerned.

The ICRC, anxious to maintain its independence and especially the speed with which it can take action, within minutes of a conflict's breaking out, wishes to emphasize the necessity of continuing to launch its own financial appeals. Giving the donors a synoptic view by including our figures in the United Nations consolidated appeals must not as a result overshadow the Committee's own financial needs, which are still substantial. These consolidated appeals, moreover, should clearly reflect the division of tasks between the United Nations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the non-governmental organizations, and should distinguish between their respective budgets.

However, the problem is that all too often, following constructive discussions leading to the distribution of urgent tasks, the ICRC, certain other non-governmental organizations, whose courage I commend, too often find themselves alone for too long periods in their theatres of operation in conflict situations. Yet the sheer magnitude of needs calls increasingly for a concerted effort beyond the capacity of the ICRC alone, which must concentrate on protection activities.

I believe that the operational aspect of United Nations humanitarian agencies must be strengthened. Resolution 46/182 provides for early-warning mechanisms, in which the ICRC plays a part on a case-by-case basis, in accordance with its principles. However, more important than early warning - which was given in Somalia, particularly by the ICRC - is a rapid response, which is sadly lacking at present.

(Mr. Sommaruga, ICRC)

What concerns me personally is the fact that the atrocities inflicted on entire populations, the immense deficiencies in the humanitarian standards that protect each and every one of us, the upsurge of violence in the world, shown on our television screens, elicit only a feeble and slow response.

It is true that needs exist everywhere, and not only in emergency situations. But providing timely help in the right place is more economical and effective than providing help tardily or coping with hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons.

(Mr. Sommaruga, ICRC)

In this connection, efforts being made in the sphere of disaster preparedness, especially by the national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies under the auspices of their Federation, deserve encouragement.

If we are to enhance the quality and effectiveness of our response to crisis situations it is important not only to ensure the coordination of humanitarian activities but also to agree on a common approach.

The work currently being carried out by the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies with a view to establishing a code of conduct for non-governmental organizations is a welcome step in that direction. Only by presenting a united front can the humanitarian organizations hope to prevent a repetition of the excesses committed by the warlords who are perpetuating many conflicts today.

The consolidation of peace should also be high on our list of priorities. The ICRC considers it essential to ensure a smooth transition between emergency situations and the subsequent stages of rehabilitation, reconstruction and development. That would help reduce, or even avoid creating, long-term dependence on aid; it would also limit the duration of emergency relief operations carried out by institutions such as the ICRC.

Generally speaking, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, guided by seven fundamental principles that have also been adopted by Governments, notes with satisfaction that three of those principles - humanity, impartiality and neutrality - were mentioned in General Assembly resolution 46/182 and have thus been recognized as the cornerstones of all humanitarian endeavour.

The principle of impartiality, which requires that assistance be proportionate to the degree of suffering and that priority be given to the

(Mr. Sommaruga, ICRC)

most urgent cases of distress, is crucial. It is observance of this principle that enables humanitarian organizations, in accordance with the acknowledged right of victims to receive assistance, to respond to emergency situations while providing all necessary guarantees of non-interference. The principles of humanity and neutrality are equally important in ensuring that humanitarian activities remain apolitical. I was pleased to hear from representatives this morning reminders of these three principles.

It would, of course, be illusory - perhaps even undesirable - to try to dissociate humanitarian endeavour completely from political action. Humanitarian work concentrates on the acute symptoms of crises, but the crises themselves cannot be resolved without political measures to tackle their underlying causes. Moreover, just as humanitarian work needs political support, political negotiations stand to benefit from the relief afforded by maintaining a measure of humanity in the midst of conflict. We are, nevertheless, convinced that humanitarian endeavour and political action must go their separate ways if the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian work is not to be jeopardized.

In any crisis in which humanitarian concerns become the overriding issue it is dangerous to regard humanitarian action as just another political tool or, conversely, as an excuse for States to shirk their political responsibilities. Indeed, to tie humanitarian activities too closely to political concerns is to run the risk of seeing humanitarian work rejected on political grounds.

In this regard, I wonder how wise it is to resort to military means to support humanitarian activities and, in certain circumstances, to protect the people who conduct them. Admittedly, the effectiveness of our operations is

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directly affected by the conditions of extreme insecurity in which we have to work. In the former Yugoslavia, and even more so in Somalia, it has unfortunately proved necessary to use armed escorts to protect humanitarian convoys.

This, however, must remain a temporary and exceptional measure, and we must take care not to start thinking of it as an acceptable long-term solution. If we resign ourselves to these means, are we not, in fact, giving up all hope of persuading the belligerents to respect not only humanitarian work but, above all, defenceless civilians and prisoners? We must also demand and restore respect for protective emblems, especially those of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, which are so often disregarded. This is vital to ensuring that humanitarian action loses neither the impartiality it must maintain if it is to work efficiently on behalf of all the victims, without discrimination, nor its necessary and concomitant independence vis-à-vis all the belligerents.

For all these reasons we believe that it is dangerous to link humanitarian activities aimed at meeting the needs of victims of a conflict with political measures designed to bring about settlement of a dispute.

Moreover, in the light of the establishment by the Security Council of a Commission of Experts to inquire into grave breaches of international humanitarian law, a clear distinction must be drawn between justice and humanitarian assistance. Although the ICRC and other humanitarian organizations are ready to take considerable risks - some might even say too many - in order to provide the victims with assistance and protection, their role is not to act as judge, and even less is it to act as prosecutor.

(Mr. Sommaruga, ICRC)

However, we should be more than happy if States were to fulfil that role, as they undertook to do in the final provisions common to the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and, more recently, in article 90 of Additional Protocol I of 1977, and we urge them to meet their obligation in that respect on a universal basis. This would discourage further violations and, in parallel with other measures, facilitate the restoration of dialogue and lasting peace.

Let me stress once again that humanitarian action deals only with the acute symptoms of a crisis. Even if humanitarian agencies are given all that they need to work effectively in the field, and even if all doors are opened to them, States cannot rely exclusively on emergency humanitarian work to provide a solution. A global approach intended to tackle the underlying causes of the crisis is a must, and this falls within the competence of Governments.

(Mr. Sommaruga, ICRC)

Humanitarian action undeniably facilitates, but in the long term can never replace, the negotiation process and the dialogue necessary at the political, military and economic levels.

The persistent violations of international humanitarian law that we are witnessing foreshadow a threat which the international community must address as a matter of utmost urgency. If today we allow the population of entire countries to be starved, forcibly transferred, threatened, terrorized or massacred, arguing that the situation they are in is too far removed from our concerns, too complex or too dangerous to handle, then one of these days, and perhaps sooner than we think, we and our own families may have to face similar risks, attacks, outrages and indifference. What is at stake today is respect for the principles on which the very survival of mankind depends. In all these circumstances, compliance with the existing rules of humanitarian law, as was stated earlier, would have helped to save hundreds of thousands of lives and to prevent countless civilians in need of protection and assistance from being forced into exile.

We can no longer tolerate that in so many conflicts whose effects spill over national borders the fate of the victims should depend on the whim of the parties concerned. We must be more forceful in letting the belligerents know that they will have to answer for their acts to the international community. Article 1, common to the four Geneva Conventions, ratified by 175 countries I would remind members, is perfectly clear on this point. The High Contracting Parties undertake to respect and ensure respect for humanitarian law in all circumstances. Thus, when a State at war violates the commitments it made on adhering to the Conventions, all other States become answerable too if they do nothing to put a stop to such violations.

(Mr. Sommaruga, ICRC)

How can we reverse this negative trend we are observing today, how can we gradually turn things around? I believe that if we are to secure greater respect for humanitarian endeavours, we must remind the community of States of their joint responsibility in that regard, as set out in article 1 common to the Geneva Conventions. States must also be prepared to put pressure on other Governments to ensure that the Conventions are complied with even outside their own borders. An ad hoc meeting of States parties to the Geneva Conventions, for example, would provide the ICRC with an opportunity to urge Governments and better obtain from them, as they have the sole responsibility before mankind, a situation where the norms of international humanitarian law become moral standards, become binding on individuals and States alike, as universally recognized and accepted as those laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We have proposed to the Swiss Federal Council, the depositary of the Geneva Conventions, that it convene a multilateral assembly of this kind so that in an exceptional and solemn forum humanitarian law may be restored to its rightful place in the concerns and duties of the international community.

Our individual and collective security can no longer be guaranteed by a balance of power, but only one of solidarity. This balance of solidarity naturally has a humanitarian aspect, whether it be respect for humanitarian law or support for humanitarian organizations. But this solidarity must also extend to measures of reconstruction, the development of mechanisms to ensure an economic and environmental situation favourable to all, and bring about the peaceful settlement of conflicts, in compliance with the instruments of international law and the values common to all mankind. If we are to succeed in this task we must be ready, each and every one of us, to fulfil our

(Mr. Sommaruga, ICRC)

respective mandates, not only by conferring with one another in these warm and comfortable surroundings in Manhattan but also by acting decisively in the field, to help the victims and be with them, whether in the deep cold of the continental winter or in the heart of the desert drought.

To conclude, I should like to take this opportunity to thank, on behalf of the ICRC, all the Governments, organizations of the United Nations system, national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, with their Federation, and non-governmental organizations which work alongside the ICRC in the common humanitarian effort to provide protection to victims of conflict.

Last but not least, the ICRC would also like to pay tribute here to all those men and women who in the field - both in their own countries and abroad - bring assistance and protection to the victims, often at considerable risk to themselves, and to remember in this forum all those among them who have given their lives in the service of the humanitarian cause.

The meeting was adjourned at 1.30 p.m.